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ABSTRACT

Every opportunity should be taken to communicate research findings both inside and outside government programs and make them accessible to policy makers, teachers, lecturers, parents, and employers. The "Interchange" series aims to further improve the Educational Research Unit's (ERU) dissemination of the findings of research funded by the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department (SOEID). This double issue of "Interchange" summarizes the findings from two projects: an international review of literature on baseline assessment, and a national survey commissioned to identify current assessment and recordkeeping practices in a representative sample of all preschool centers. The first part of the report details the baseline assessment literature review and examines current assessment practice, purposes of assessment, making the case for baseline assessment, baseline assessment in England and Wales, and how assessments are conducted and used. The second section details preschool record keeping in Scotland and includes discussion of the importance, effects, parental response, training and support, and recommendations. Findings noted include variability in assessment practices between different types of centers, and little passage of information between preschool and primary school teachers about individual children. (Contains 32 references.) (SD)

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THE SCOTTISH OFFICE
Education and Industry Department

INTERCHANGE

No 55

Baseline Assessment Literature Review
and
Pre-School Record Keeping in Scotland

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Baseline Assessment Literature Review

and

Pre-School Record Keeping in Scotland

J Eric Wilkinson *(University of Glasgow),* ***Joyce Watt*** *(University of Aberdeen),* ***Angela Napuk*** and ***Barbara Normand*** *(University of Edinburgh)*

Over the past year the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department has collaborated with a number of academics and practitioners in looking at baseline assessment. As part of the work, a national survey was commissioned to identify current assessment and record-keeping practices in a representative sample of all pre-school centres. In addition, an international review of literature on baseline assessment was undertaken. This double issue of **Interchange** *summarises the findings from both these projects.*

A strong message from the pre-school survey was the variability in assessment practices between different types of centre – a substantial proportion of centres did not maintain records on children's progress. It was also discovered that staff in pre-schools gave little priority to informing their colleagues in primary schools about individual children.

As far as the development of baseline assessment schemes in other countries is concerned, most work has been carried out in England, where the undertaking of such assessments is now mandatory in all primary schools.

On the basis of both the literature review and the survey, a number of recommendations were made to the Scottish Office about how to proceed with developing a national baseline assessment strategy in Scotland.

Part I - Baseline Assessment Literature Review

Introduction

In the late 1990s assessment and record keeping in early childhood education operate in a dramatically changed educational and political context. Five specific features can be identified in this changed context:

- an acknowledgement of the early years as being fundamental to later educational achievement
- the availability of provision for all four year olds, as required
- the publication of national curricular guidelines for children in their pre-school year
- the publication of a national childcare strategy for Scotland
- the introduction in England and Wales of mandatory assessment for all children starting primary school.

Current assessment practice

It is now widely accepted that assessment is an essential feature of sound educational practice. Virtually all educational establishments have policies and practices in place to assess their pupils and students. The form any assessment takes is inextricably bound up with its purpose. In general, if the purpose is concerned with the day-to-day planning of teaching and learning, formative assessments, based on observation and professional judgements are more appropriate, though summative assessments in the form of short 'class tests' are not ruled out. If, on the other hand, the purpose is more concerned with the levels of attainment, summative type assessments based on objective measurements are more appropriate, though such assessments are sometimes supported by additional qualitative information.

What is being assessed

What is being assessed will also vary considerably. In early childhood education the emphasis of any assessment framework is likely to be on child development criteria such as general cognitive, social and physical development. In some it will focus on progress in basic educational skills, particularly numeracy and literacy, while in others it will cover each area of national curriculum guidelines. Views about the structure of the curriculum will inevitably affect the content of any assessment scheme. Where the balance of the curriculum is weighted towards basic core skills, the assessment will be similarly aligned. If, however, the curriculum is broad-based it is important to assess children's progress against a similarly broad range of criteria. If the assessment is based on limited criteria the balance in the curriculum delivered by schools will also tend to be influenced by those criteria that are used.

Since the introduction of national testing by the Conservative government in the 1980s, a sea change has taken place in the purpose of assessment.

Current purposes of assessment

Since the introduction of national testing by the Conservative government in the 1980s, a sea change has taken place in the purpose of assessment. Where traditionally assessment was based almost exclusively on the broad purposes of teaching and learning, it is also now increasingly focusing on raising educational standards in line with present Government policy partly reflected in its programme of Early Intervention. In order to assist the process of raising standards, considerable investment is now taking place in the early stages of a child's formal education. Various schemes are being put in place to identify children whose learning is considered to be inadequate and to offset any possible subsequent learning difficulties. Questions are now being asked about the effectiveness of such early intervention. Answers to these questions are increasingly being located in the assessment of children's progress.

Where traditionally assessment was based almost exclusively on the broad purposes of teaching and learning, it is also now increasingly focusing on raising educational standards in line with present Government policy

In 1996 the Scottish Office identified the need for assessment on entry to school. In its report *Improving Achievement in Scottish Schools*, the Task Force on Underachievement in Scotland recommended that 'a method of assessing children on entry to Primary 1 should be devised.' This was reiterated in 1998 in *Improving Reading at the Early Stages*, which stated that 'schools, education authorities and HMI should work together to provide advice on baseline assessment.'

Information from assessment is now required to evaluate the effectiveness of different educational institutions, principally schools. No longer is it accepted that all schools are doing a good job. In addition, accountability and new management practices have heralded the concept of 'value-added'. Headteachers, Directors of Education and HMIs are all interested, for different reasons, in evaluating the effectiveness of particular schools. In particular, Recommendation 6 of the SOEID Task Force report specifically recommended that action be taken on developing value-added measurements:

> *The Scottish Office and education authorities should complete work to establish a national database which will allow relative value-added measurements to be made for all schools, desirably from entry at P1.*
>
> (SOEID, 1996, p. 15))

Thus a key question is whether we can legitimately link current classroom-related purposes of assessment in early childhood education to the wider purposes now emerging. Primary school teachers, nursery teachers and nursery nurses working directly with young children regularly undertake formative assessment of children's progress using a variety of techniques such as observations and checklists. This practice is part of the educational process in all primary schools and how far it is also practised in pre-school settings in Scotland is reported in the second part of this ***Interchange*** (Pre-School Record Keeping in Scotland – P9). Support for such an approach to assessment as a means of raising standards has recently been endorsed by Black and William (1998):

Thus a key question is whether we can legitimately link current classroom related purposes of assessment in early childhood education

to the wider purposes now emerging

> *The main plank of our argument is that standards are raised only by changes which are put into direct effect by teachers and pupils in classrooms. There is a body of firm evidence that formative assessment is an essential feature of classroom work and that development of it can raise standards. We know of no other way of raising standards for which such a strong* prima facie *case can be made on the basis of evidence of such large learning gains.*
>
> (Black and William, 1998, p. 19)

Making the case for baseline assessment

The case for assessing children on entry to school was put forward by Blatchford and Cline (1992, 1994). The four main arguments are:

- getting a profile of the new entrant in order to inform the subsequent pedagogy for each child
- identification of children who may have difficulties at school
- getting a picture of the new intake as a whole, based on groups of children
- using it as a basis for measuring the impact of the school, i.e. the 'value-added' perspective.

There is considerable debate in the literature (Drummond, 1993; Lindsay, 1997) as to whether any one baseline assessment scheme can adequately address each of the purposes. Wolfendale (1993) identified a number of concerns and dilemmas which are 'an amalgam of technical educational and socio-political issues.' Despite what Wolfendale refers to as 'a long list of objections to baseline assessment – at every level – theoretical, ideological, practical and financial', she concludes:

> *Paradoxically in fact there does not appear to be a consensus, based on reality principles, that a form or forms, of on-entry to school assessment is a viable idea.*
>
> (Wolfendale, 1993, p. 33)

Baseline assessment is potentially a very useful addition to the education system

– but only if developed and used widely.

However, considerable concern has been expressed about the purpose and practice:

> *Early years educators need to treat the issue of assessment very carefully. We need to be clear about which purposes of assessment we are working towards, and which models of the early years curriculum and of children's learning underpin our models of assessment. We cannot uncritically adopt a model handed down from the National Curriculum and assessment procedures.*
>
> (Burgess-Macey, 1994, p. 48)

Similarly, Lindsay, in a recent paper, concludes:

> *Baseline assessment is potentially a very useful addition to the education system – but only if developed and used widely.*
>
> (Lindsay, 1997, p. 26)

Baseline assessment in England and Wales

From September 1998 it will be a statutory requirement for all maintained primary schools in England and Wales to use an accredited assessment scheme with all children starting school, whether in reception classes for four year olds or in Year 1 for five year olds starting primary school (Education Act, 1997, Part IV, chapter 1). Such baseline assessments have two key purposes:

> • *to provide information to help teachers plan effectively to meet children's individual learning needs*
>
> • *to measure children's attainment, using one or more numerical outcomes which can be used later in value-added analyses of children's progress.*
>
> (SCAA, 1997a)

It will be the task of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (previously the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) until 1 October 1997) to accredit local schemes. In June 1997 SCAA published accreditation criteria for such schemes (SCAA, 1997b). In addition SCAA issued its own Baseline Assessment Scales (SCAA, 1997c) which have been developed for optional use to support schools in conducting baseline assessments. These scales in them-

selves do not form a separate scheme but schools are advised that they may be used as part of a formally accredited scheme.

In conjunction with the publication of the National Framework and the Scales, SCAA (1996b) has also published *Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning on Entering Compulsory Education*, which is intended to specify outcomes for four- and five-year-old children in a variety of settings – both pre-school and primary school. Recently, this was augmented by *Looking at Children's Learning* (1997a), intended to promote a common understanding of what the 'Desirable Outcomes' mean.

Trials of baseline assessments have been conducted in England and Wales (SCAA, 1996c; Caspall *et al.*, 1997). The trials were used to examine issues such as the technical performance of the scales, classroom manageability, and the timing. On the basis of the findings of the trials, final scales have now been published (SCAA, 1997c).

A comparison of selected baseline assessment schemes in England and Wales

Blatchford and Cline (1992) proposed a framework for comparing various assessment schemes. They used four headings:

- theoretical integrity
- practical efficacy
- equity
- accountability.

Using these criteria, the following schemes were selected:

PIPS – Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (Durham) (Tymms and Merrell, 1996)
Signposts – baseline assessment for the primary phase (Birmingham City Council, 1997)
Wandsworth Baseline Scheme (Wandsworth, 1992)
A Framework for Entry Assessment (Leeds, 1997)
Infant Index (Desforges and Lindsay, 1995)
SCAA Baseline Assessment Scales (SCAA, 1997c)

A number of basic questions were put forward as a basis for the comparison.

What are baseline assessments?

Although none of the schemes selected explicitly defines the term 'baseline assessment' it can be surmised that, in general, baseline assessment schemes are measures of children's knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills at the beginning of formal education. This definition is consistent with the description given in the Education Act, 1997 (Part IV).

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What purposes do they have?

Most of the schemes explicitly outline their purposes though the scheme developed in Birmingham (Signposts) has the most extensive list of aims. The following aims were identified across the various schemes:

- to record aspects of a child's knowledge, abilities etc
- to assist pedagogy, including diagnosis of learning difficulties
- to identify children with special needs
- to provide a common frame of reference for staff
- to promote home and school continuity/dialogue
- to assist with school planning
- to provide value-added information
- to assist with school inspections
- to assist with LEA planning
- to inform LEA evaluation.

What form do they take?

Baseline assessments take several forms – 'tests', checklists, scales or narrative descriptions. The Wandsworth scheme relies heavily on checklists whereas Signposts relies more on scales. The PIPS scheme uses a modified psychometric approach and Leeds relies entirely on professional judgement. In the Signposts scheme, Assessment Statements for each designated area are specified for the person undertaking the assessment. The assessor then assigns a code on a four-point scale.

What is assessed?

All the schemes examined assess children's competence in literacy and numeracy/mathematics. Literacy is frequently broken down into component parts:

- speaking and listening
- reading
- writing.

In the Wandsworth scheme a specific test of reading readiness is used (LAAR) and in the SCAA scheme three separate reading scales are included.

For numeracy/maths, several schemes also divide this area into component parts:

- applications
- counting
- shape.

All schemes are designed to give both formative and summative information in these areas.

There is variation, however, in the significance attributed to personal and social development. The Wandsworth, Leeds, Infant Index and Signposts schemes all give personal and social development a central role. With PIPS, materials are currently being piloted. In the SCAA scheme personal and social development is given less significance that the other two areas.

Are the assessments linked to curricular aims?

In slightly different ways all the schemes relate in part to the outcomes outlined in the SCAA publication *Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning on Entering Compulsory Education* (SCAA, 1996b). The outcomes are classified into six areas of learning:

- personal and social development
- language and literacy
- numeracy/maths
- knowledge and understanding of the world
- physical development
- creative development.

However, only the Leeds scheme provides a comprehensive assessment of all six curricular areas. In the others, the last three (knowledge and understanding, physical development and creative development) are omitted, possibly because the assessment of these areas is more problematic.

When are the assessments conducted?

Most baseline assessment schemes in England and Wales are undertaken with four-year-old children in the reception classes of primary schools. Although reception class attendance is voluntary, many children in England and Wales are enrolled. Compulsory schooling does not start till a child is five. If a child does not attend a reception class, baseline assessments are conducted in the first term of Primary 1.

How are the assessments conducted?

The context for conducting baseline assessments differs between schemes, though all schemes stress the importance of using a range of contexts.

In the Leeds scheme, observation is central. Assessors are advised to observe:

- what children do
- what children say
- how children behave and respond
- children's interactions with others
- how children respond to questions
- how children respond to problems
- the context in which children are learning
- new achievements.

With PIPS, however, a more structured approach is adopted in psuedo-test form. Children are required to engage with pre-specified tasks, such as writing, pointing, counting, and then performance is scored. Children are systematically taken through each item.

Who conducts assessments?

Overwhelmingly baseline assessments are carried out jointly by all staff involved in the educational provision for each child, i.e. they are conducted by professionals who are familiar with the child. In almost all cases a teacher, either in the nursery, the reception class or the primary school, will be involved. In most schemes, staff are expected to conduct assessments as part of the routine teaching and learning process.

What are assessments used for?

The practical uses to which the assessments are put are related to the overall purposes. In all schemes a balance is established between the principal formative function of assessment, i.e. informing pedagogy, and the summative function, as a value-added measure. Subtle differences can be identified, however, in this balance between the schemes. The Leeds scheme emphasises the value of assessment in informing the teacher (or nursery nurse) about each individual child to assist in the teaching and learning process. It also displays an awareness of the dangers of the summative assessment distorting formative assessments.

How is the value-added component calculated?

In line with the legislation, all schemes make provision for arriving at scores in each of the areas assessed. All schemes also use an overall aggregated score but the curricular areas contributing to the aggregated score vary from scheme to scheme, as do the weighting and total maximum score. Both the Leeds and PIPS schemes currently omit the personal and social development score from the overall total. All of the schemes omit any scoring of knowledge and understanding, creative development and physical development.

There is considerable variation between the schemes in the overall value-added total, making it difficult to draw comparisons between LEAs, and virtually impossible to arrive at national comparative data.

Most schemes require the school to send the completed assessment form for a class or group of children to a central point in the relevant LEA where the data are processed. Individual schools receive feedback on their performance but comparisons between schools remain confidential to the LEA. There is no national system of collecting data.

Who has access to the assessments?

At school level the assessments are accessible to all staff in order to promote more effective teaching and learning. Teachers are also encouraged to share the assessment of individual children with their parents in order to promote partnership. In some schemes (for example Leeds) parents are involved in the on-entry assessment process and home visits are encouraged.

How are they resourced?

All of the schemes selected produce glossy handbooks which fully explain the purpose of, procedures for and uses of baseline assessments. Most schemes are supported by appropriate staff development activities. In some schemes headteachers are encouraged to manage their staff group so that individual teachers undertake the assessments. In some cases supply-teachers are available to take classes when the class-teachers are carrying out the assessments.

Part II - Pre-School Record Keeping in Scotland

Introduction

Given that any strategy for a baseline assessment programme in Scotland would be likely to include the pre-school year, it is important to establish a picture of the current assessment practices across all pre-school sectors in Scotland and identify key issues.

In the spring of 1997 a sampling frame based on all sectors of pre-school education and all 32 new local authorities was drawn up. Pre-school groups were classified as:

- local authority nursery schools and classes
- local authority day nurseries/family centres
- community nurseries
- voluntary sector playgroups
- private sector nurseries
- independent schools' nurseries.

A 25 per cent quota sample (880 groups) was then identified.

Questionnaires were sent out in spring 1997 with two main aims: to gain basic information on centres and their assessment/record-keeping practices; and to assess the views of pre-school staff on the relative importance of different purposes of assessment and record keeping. The response rate was 57 per cent (501 returns) although this varied greatly between sectors – nursery school

classes (70 per cent), private nurseries (59 per cent), playgroups (50 per cent), day nurseries (68 per cent).

Interviews also took place in nine centres representative of the pre-school field as a whole but selected on the basis of their clear involvement in assessment and record keeping. This gave some insight into the particular schemes in use and some reactions to the issues which emerged from the survey.

Nearly one-third of centres, most commonly playgroups, did not maintain any written record of children's progress.

Summary of the main findings

Nearly one-third of centres, most commonly playgroups, did not maintain any written record of children's progress. Practice among the 66 per cent who did keep records varied widely. The importance of record keeping was generally accepted.

Practice among the 66 per cent which did keep records varied widely.

Where records were kept, language (65.8 per cent), social/personal development (65.2 per cent) and physical/motor development (58.2 per cent) were most frequently noted.

Most assessment was done by observation and recorded using *ad hoc* instruments for both formative and summative purposes. Practitioners want assessment strategies to be a reflection of their child-centred philosophy and based on the on-going work of the group.

Almost all centres shared the record with parents, but two-thirds (68.5 per cent) of centres claimed ownership. A few invited parents to contribute.

Nearly two-thirds held meetings with their primary school but less than half transferred a written record; and a high proportion regarded passing on information to the primary school as one of the least important functions of pre-school record keeping. Links between pre-school groups and primary schools are patchy and variable. The purposes of record keeping were seen largely in terms of learning and teaching. Low priority was given to quality assurance and accountability as well as to pre-school/primary liaison.

The voluntary sector is more anxious, fearing that written records

Issues

Do pre-school groups see record keeping as important?

may be incompatible with playgroup philosophy.

Most pre-school groups, certainly in the public and private sectors, see assessment and record keeping as important as long as they are based on children's learning needs, are handled sensitively and take a positive approach. They also have an important function for staff and parents. The voluntary sector is more anxious, fearing that written records may be incompatible with playgroup philosophy. Overall, some regret the absence of guidance and look for help and support and others are pleased to pursue their own *ad hoc* schemes, which they feel suit their children and themselves.

Will an increased emphasis on assessment and record keeping compromise the nature of pre-school education?

Again, the voluntary sector is most likely to see this as a threat but others claim that assessment and record keeping are already there and are helpful if implemented sensitively and within a curriculum framework that is based on the learning needs of children. Many, however, acknowledge with some anxiety a trend for pre-school education, with its increasing emphasis on assessment and planning, to become more adult-centred, to put more pressure on staff, and reduce their time for core work with children.

Opportunities and problems of linking pre-school records to primary education

Practice and attitudes vary widely but overall practical links are very common. However, there is also evidence to suggest that there are more often tensions surrounding the handing on of formal records from one stage to the next.

First, there is a common perception among pre-school staff that many primary staff are not interested in pre-school records except in relation to children with problems because primary staff want to make their own assessments. Some pre-school staff feel strongly that primary staff have unrealistically low expectations and children often work at levels far below their potential.

Some, however, see merit in the 'clean sheet syndrome' of the primary school which may avoid the danger of premature 'labelling' and some in the voluntary sector maintain that parents do not want a formal record to go with the child to the primary school. A few, particularly in the voluntary and independent sectors, feel that their competence to observe and assess children in ways which might be helpful to the primary school is in doubt.

Second, there is some frustration that, even where links between pre-school groups and primary schools are good, the initiative for the links almost always comes from the pre-school and even then are low in the primary school's priorities. Pre-school staff had themselves, of course, seen linking with primary schools as one of the least important purposes for their own assessment practices.

Third, pre-school staff acknowledge the major practical difficulties for primary schools: they often serve a large number of pre-school groups, only some of which will have kept formal records, and there is unlikely to be much commonality of style. Given this context, some pre-school groups see the pre-school record as the property of the parent which s/he may or may not pass on to the primary school, and this compounds the problem. The whole process is easiest in the nursery class which is an integral part of a primary school.

Parents and record keeping

The great majority of pre-schools share their records with parents either through written reports or meetings or both. Some involve parents themselves in the

assessment of their own children and encourage them to make contributions to written records, although this is a practice which can bring its own problems. Finally, there is a small but significant trend to see ownership of the pre-school record as lying with the parents. Interestingly, many parents do not hand the report on to the primary school. The role of parents in assessment and record keeping is critical, both in terms of their rights as parents and the importance of their contribution.

Training and support

Despite the widespread acceptance of the importance of assessment and record keeping, many staff, particularly in the voluntary sector, need training and support.

The role of pre-school education

Assessment and record keeping epitomise a tension which lies at the heart of pre-school education as it tries to reconcile its belief in itself as a distinctive and critical educational stage in its own right with its role as the first formal stage of an educational service. As the former it needs to establish its own philosophy and practice, and as the latter it has to 'link with' if not 'prepare for' the subsequent stages of learning. It is a tension which needs to be recognised and resolved as a year of pre-school education becomes the right of every child in Scotland, and as patterns of baseline assessment which straddle the pre-school year and the first year of the primary school are implemented.

Baseline assessment can provide both a reasonably valid basis on which to plan children's learning experiences and a means of identifying effective teaching

Conclusions

In the light of our review of current developments in the construction and use of baseline assessment, particularly in England and Wales, and of current pre-school assessment in Scotland, it is possible to draw a number of conclusions:

- baseline assessment can provide both a reasonably valid basis on which to plan children's learning experiences and a means of identifying effective teaching
- experience of accrediting local baseline assessment schemes in England and Wales suggests that a single national scheme is preferable to an accreditation of local schemes
- current baseline assessment schemes have taken a narrow perspective on assessing children's learning, though more recent schemes attempt to cover all the recommended curricular areas
- incorporating a pedagogic purpose with a value-added purpose within baseline assessment is feasible but the nature of the scheme should give priority to the former
- teachers and others working in pre-school education accept the importance of assessment and record keeping for learning and teaching. They will need training and support in any development of current practice
- links between pre-school groups and primary schools need to be strengthened. However, care needs to be given to establishing an appropriate balance of effort between pre-school and primary school.

Teachers and others working in pre-school education accept the importance of assessment and record keeping for learning and teaching. They will need training and support in any development of current practice.

Recommendations

Following the reviews of developments in baseline assessment and current assessment practice in Scottish pre-school establishments, we made the following recommendations for the development of a pilot baseline assessment scheme for Scotland. The recommendations are as follows:

- a baseline assessment scheme could and should be developed for use in all primary schools in Scotland
- account should be taken of assessment of children in their pre-school year, and, given current government policy to extend provision to three year olds, an extended picture of a child's learning should be used to inform the baseline assessment
- the scheme should give priority to and display sensitivity to the need to promote children's learning
- the scheme should be easily managed within normal classroom activities
- the scheme should cover all curricular areas
- teachers should be given adequate guidance and support in undertaking baseline assessment through a range of staff development activities
- parents should be kept informed of the outcome of the assessment and, where appropriate, included in the process
- mechanisms should be established both at local authority and national level for coordinating the value-added component of such assessments.

The scheme should cover all curricular areas.

Rationale for national Scottish baseline assessment scheme

The primary purpose of a national scheme for Scotland would be to inform learning and teaching in terms of learning opportunities and special needs, and to provide an individual baseline against which a child's progress could be recorded. Other purposes would be to inform school and local authority planning and help decision making aimed at raising levels of educational achievement. The assessment programme would cover both the pre-school year and Primary 1, including all aspects of the curriculum as set out in the respective curriculum documents (SOED, 1989 and SOEID, 1997). It would be achieved through the observation of children in the playroom or classroom and through information gathered from adults who knew the child well.

Suggested structure

It was suggested that the pre-school version of the scheme would normally be completed by May, and the Primary 1 version by the end of Term 2 in the following year. Both would be based on formative assessments of children, built up throughout the year, but summarised for discussion with parents and with the teacher at the next stage. The cumulative record would provide a basis for planning and discussion amongst staff, parents and other professionals as appropriate, at the point of entry to Primary 1 and during the child's first year in school.

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Current work on baseline assessment in Scotland

Pilot studies

An experimental assessment scheme has been developed based on the recommendations set out above. The Primary 1 version was piloted in February 1998, across Scotland, with seven local authorities and 27 schools taking part. In early March a day was held to brief the 27 teachers who had agreed to take part in the scheme. The assessment programme was completed by the end of March and results are now being analysed. Teachers' views of the programme, its value and its manageability are also being evaluated through a questionnaire and a series of interviews.

In May 1998 a parallel version of the programme was piloted at the pre-school level, all sectors (public, voluntary and independent) agreeing to take part. Six local authorities agreed to be involved with some overlap from the Primary 1 pilot. In all, 45 pre-school groups took part and day seminars to inform and support staff were held throughout Scotland in early May. A support and evaluation programme similar to the one used for the Primary 1 pilot was carried out and the results will be available in autumn 1998.

The views expressed in this **Interchange** *are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of The Scottish Office or any other organisations by whom the authors are employed.*

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